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MARK SILVERMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/27/2016

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS: POTENTIAL FOR POST-ELECTORAL CONFLICT

Classified By: PolChief Erik Hall for reasons 1.4 (b&d)

11. (C) Summary: There are several possible scenarios for post-electoral conflict beginning as early as the first round of presidential elections on October 15. This report highlights these possibilities, gauges their probability, and recommends the Department prepare for contingencies which would enable mechanisms for the USG to contribute indirectly to their prevention and peaceful resolution. End Summary.

Background

12. (C) Ecuador's past elections have not generated significant post-electoral conflict but new conditions in the upcoming first round October 15 election and the Mexican example raise a possibility of post-electoral conflict which we should not ignore. Several presidential candidates have already made allegations of planned electoral fraud, which the OAS and other independent electoral watchdogs have thus far judged to be unfounded. We and most observers here judge the allegations from the Correa (PAIS), Rosero (PRE) and Macas (Pachakutik) campaigns are politically motivated, designed to prepare the ground for possible post-electoral challenges or excuses. Nevertheless, these unfounded claims could undermine in advance the credibility of the elections. For that reason, the OAS and other objective election observers, including the credible and USG-sponsored civil society group Citizen Participation, have publicly countered fraud claims, expressing confidence in existing safeguards and recommending several ways election authorities can boost public confidence.

13. (C) Despite these efforts to boost public confidence, conditions could support several alternative scenarios for post-electoral conflict after October 15. While TSE has performed well to date, it remains unclear whether it could withstand a deluge of post-electoral challenges. This makes the role of independent observers, national and international, all the more critical.

Scenarios for Post-Electoral Conflict

14. (C) It is important to be clear that we consider electoral fraud to be unlikely to occur at levels that call national election results into question. Nevertheless, there are several scenarios where one or another presidential candidate or party are likely to claim that fraud cost them the election.

¶5. (C) The first scenario for post-electoral conflict could occur in the event radical front-running candidate Rafael Correa comes close but falls short of outright victory in the first round (which requires 40% of valid votes and a 10-point margin over the runner-up). In this situation, Correa could claim he would have won, were he not blocked by fraud committed by the powers that be. By portraying himself as a victim of fraud, Correa could actually seek to challenge results (this challenge would likely be rebuffed by the TSE), or simply use victimhood status to his political benefit in the second round of voting on November 26.

¶6. (C) Another scenario would involve a close finish between second and third-place finishers in the presidential race. This eventuality could likely be easily dealt with by election authorities recounting vote to reconfirm disputed results from specific areas.

¶7. (C) A less likely scenario for post-electoral conflict could emanate from the second place finisher (most likely Leon Roldos or Alvaro Noboa, according to recent polling), should Correa win over 40% but the runner-up fail to finish within ten points of Correa. Since a challenge could be the difference between an outright Correa win on October 15 and a required second round, Roldos or Noboa would have a strong incentive to demand a recount or challenge the results.

¶8. (C) By far the most likely, but least significant post-electoral scenario involves Roldosista Party candidate Fernando Rosero, who used election fraud as a campaign theme. In almost any scenario, Rosero will go down in defeat, and will surely blame fraud for his unpopularity at the polls. This scenario has little consequence, since his claims will lack credibility, and will most likely be dismissed by the TSE.

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Implications for US Interests

¶9. (C) Post-electoral challenges will generate uncertainty and further strain already weak democratic institutions here. It is in our interest to strengthen these institutions, and we hope to help by preventing post-electoral conflict or supporting mechanisms to resolve it peacefully. Our role in supporting the election process is by necessity indirect, accomplished through support to the OAS and civil society electoral watchdog groups such as Citizen Participation and the indigenous Q'ellkaj Foundation.

¶10. (C) We hope these efforts will prevent post-electoral conflict, but should it occur, would like to flag for the Department the possibility that we will be asked for additional support. For example, the OAS is planning to be present through the second round of voting, but could conceivably exhaust its resources early if an extensive post-electoral role arbitrating disputes or monitoring a recount is necessary. To the extent possible, it would be in USG interests to be prepared for this contingency.

¶11. (C) Similarly, USAID support for civil society groups could also be exhausted under extraordinary circumstances of post-electoral conflict.

Recommendations

¶12. (C) To prepare for the possibility of post-electoral conflict, we recommend that the Department consider the possibility that additional resources may be necessary to support the democratic process in Ecuador. Our hope is that preparing for this eventuality could help prevent it, or help Ecuador resolve conflict should it materialize. Ultimately, we are convinced that strengthening the democratic process is more important to long term U.S. democracy interests here than any particular electoral outcome.

